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Capitalism and Moral Corrosion in The Great Gatsby: A Marxist and New Historicist Reading

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Abstract

The social hypocrisy that came after the First World War and with the rapid industrialization of the first half of the twentieth century had an impact on attitudes towards morality, religion and systems of belief. In response to this crisis, and as a reaction to the uncertainty and disenchantment of this era, the modernist novel was born, and it put society into moral crisis. During the 1920s, with capitalism changing social values, relations between classes, and personal relations, American society was reorganized on several levels. Therefore, emotion and ethical depth were progressively replaced by materialistic pursuits. Moral instability and social corruption were reflected in the modernist novels. The Great Gatsby (1925) presents a world where material desire and class privilege are the main values, while moral institutions are subject to economic power. This paper argues that moral decay, encountered in the novel, is not just a result of personal moral failure but a consequence of the capitalist system, operating in the specific historical contexts. Through a Marxist and New Historicist approach, we identify trends of corruption, hypocrisy, and moral ambivalence within characters and demonstrate that moral corruption runs through the very fabric of society. Capitalism is therefore introduced as a historical power that creates moral and spiritual imbalance.

Keywords: The Great Gatsby, Corruption, Capitalism, Marxism, and New Historicism.

1. INTRODUCTION

In general, modernist novels can be defined as those published between the 1880s and the mid-1940s. Political, economic and cultural changes occurred profoundly in society during this period. Human relations and social patterns were reinvented by the two World Wars, intensive industrialization, the population of large cities and the establishment of global capitalism. The contemporary man was cast into a world without finding moral guarantees or spiritual stasis. As David Daiches (2016) argues, the modern novel in the Western world expresses the specific “situations and diseases” of its historical moment (Daiches, 2016, p. 881). Modernist fiction rejected the stable moral frameworks of the Romantic and Victorian periods and questioned the existence of fixed truths. According to Daiches (2016), reality in the modern novel is no longer objective but depends upon individual consciousness (p. 814). Everything becomes open to doubt and reinterpretation.

Authors such as Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Joseph Conrad were experimenting with new forms of narration in an attempt to reflect on this discontinuous reality. The stream of consciousness style that was first theorized by William James in *Principles of Psychology* (1890) became a new characteristic of modern fiction (Cuddon, 2007). This approach looks at the intra-process of thought and all the anarchy of perception and identity. However, modernism was not necessarily a style innovation, as it was also a response to harsh historical and material crises.

The absurdity of modern life, accentuated in the aftermath of the First World War, is an indication of the loss of traditional values and the growth of industrial capitalism. The state of moral perplexity and existential precariousness was initially manifested in works of modernist fiction, though the term "the absurd" was subsequently used as a name for the twentieth-century theatre (Cuddon, 2007). The war destroyed confidence in progress, while capitalism reshaped society upon the principles of production, profit, and consumption. The human value gradually came to be quantified in terms of wealth and social status instead of moral values. These ideological changes are reflected in literature as a reflection of its era.

Within the American system, the 1920s, the Jazz Age, were a period of economic boom coupled with Prohibition and speculative wealth, as well as increasing disparities along social class lines. The American dream, once viewed as a source of hard work and moral uplifting, slowly turned into a pursuit of material possessions and status-seeking. One of New Historicist approaches views literary works as the result of their historical and ideological contexts, shaped by the influence of authority systems and discourses of the historical period. Meanwhile, Marxist criticism shows that economic systems define relations of classes and shape ethical values. Together, all approaches examine how capitalism plays a role in historical mechanisms, redefining moral principles and human aspirations.

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald depicts 1920s America as a society organized around wealth, classes and material interest. The novel shows the growing divide between classes with corruption, as Sarah Hyun (2018) notes. Fitzgerald himself had suffered the social insulation structured on money as a result of being born into a middle-income family in 1896. According to Andrew Turnbull (1962), Fitzgerald identified the central injustice as that of a poor young man failing to marry a girl with money. Similarly, James L. W. West (2005) focuses on the autobiographical factors embodied in Fitzgerald's portrayal of love, ambition and class anxiety.

At first sight, the novel seems to be a love-romance story, but it also reveals other aspects of class privilege, hypocrisy and moral corruption. In contrast to the Victorian novel, which tended to provide moral education directly, modern fiction is based on symbolism and social representation. Symbols such as the Eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg, the Valley of Ashes, and the recurring color represent the spiritual barrenness and materialism of the era. Such symbols are not only a means of depicting personal feelings; they demonstrate the ideological order of a capitalist society.

The modern man seems caught between the two worlds, disappearing and struggling to appear. Existing moral systems are becoming weaker as they are replaced by a new model in which economic strength and material success are the core values. This paper posits, through Marxist and New Historicist approaches, that the moral decline portrayed in the novel is not merely the consequence of personal frailty. It is rather a reflection of the historical moment in capitalism that changed the values, the relations and the dreams of the 1920s. The paper examines characters from different social classes and demonstrates how capitalism creates an ethical instability and social corruption throughout the social structure. This study attempts to explore two main research questions related to the intersection of economic systems and moral decline. How does the capitalist socioeconomic structure of the 1920's affect the moral decay of characters in *The Great Gatsby*? Second, how does the personal relationship, as a commodity, a means of class struggle and historical discourse undermine the traditional American Dream?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach with a dual framework of Marxist literary criticism and New Historicism. It uses close textual analysis of specific passages from *The Great Gatsby* (1925) to explore the relationship between capitalist ideology and moral decay. The paper interprets the novel from the perspective of Marxism, looking at the economic 'base' (that is, the 1920s capitalist system) and how it affects the 'superstructure' (the moral values, ethics, or social relations of the characters). At the same time, New Historicism is used to place these themes in the particular cultural context of the Roaring Twenties, interpreting the novel not as a work of fiction but as a historical record of prevailing fears and changing social hierarchies of that time. This analytical process is carried out in three phases. First, there are key moments in a text that are chosen that engage key characters—Gatsby,

Daisy, Tom Buchanan, and George Wilson—with class relations and moral conflict. Second, these passages are examined in terms of Marxist notions of commodity, alienation, false consciousness, and other theories, as well as the new historicist notions of the intertwining of literary texts, networks of power, and historical discourse (Greenblatt, 1988). Third, the results are placed in the context of the socio-economic conditions of the 1920s in America, especially the development of consumer culture and class division.

The study concentrates on significant narrative scenes that are marked with spatial symbolism (East Egg, West Egg, Valley of Ashes) and interpersonal relations (Gatsby–Daisy, Tom–Myrtle) to present class dynamics. These passages are then closely read to uncover the underlying ideology of capitalism within the language and structure. The integrated methodological approach mirrors the current practices in literary research that rely on close reading and application of theory to create historically informed interpretations (Tyson, 2015; Ryan, 2017).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MARXISM AND NEW HISTORICISM

Commodification is among the Marxist concepts that can be applied to this research. According to Georg Lukács (1971), in the capitalist system, social relations among individuals are assumed to be more like relations between things. The emotions, identities, and relations between human beings are viewed as commodities that can be exchanged. The result of this process is what Marx terms alienation in this context, a state in which people lose touch with the true values of human beings as their lives are dominated by materialistic interests (Marx, 1978). The social identity in 1920s American society was shaped by wealth and consumption as its focal points. The American Dream has gradually evolved from an ethical ambition to tangible possessions, which perpetuate class separation and social inequalities. This paper employs Marxism and New Historicism to analyze the problems of moral corruption and social decadence in *The Great Gatsby*. Marxist approaches to literature criticism are based on the works of Karl Marx, especially his notion that the social relationships, ideology, and moral principles of society are shaped by the economic organization (Marx and Engels, 1978). The material production and wealth ownership of the capitalistic system define the hierarchy of classes and determine human behavior. As Marx argues, the ideas of the ruling class are the dominant ideas of any age (Marx and Engels, 1978). Thus, the interests of people holding economic power are marked by the moral standards and social norms.

The other important Marxist concept is false consciousness, which was subsequently used by Marxist thinkers such as Louis Althusser (1971). False consciousness is used to mean the manner in which people internalize and reproduce the prevailing ideology without awareness of its structural inequalities. Within a capitalist society, individuals might consider being successful, rich, and socially prestigious even when such attributes contribute to moral decadence. With the help of this mechanism, the idea of moral corruption can be conceived in the novel not merely as the weakness of a particular individual,

but as a process of acquiring the capitalist ideology. New Historicism enhances elements of Marxist interpretations by contextualizing the text of the story within time and culture. According to Stephen Greenblatt (1988), literary works do not exist in isolation; they form part of networks of power, discourse, and ideology. A text is an expression and reflection of the political and economic structures of its time. New Historicists reject literature as independent of history; they believe that literature contributes to the construction of cultural meaning.

This paper employs a Marxist and New Historicist perspective, arguing that the characters presented in the novel are structurally organized by the 1920s capitalist existence, rather than failing in their moral decisions. Class hierarchy, economic power, and ideological pressure influence the pursuit of characters' ambitions, their relationships, and their moral decisions. Therefore, the novel demonstrates the process of capitalism as a historical power that reorganizes moral norms and creates social decay. 1920s America was marked by economic boom, speculative wealth, prohibition, organized crime, and class stratification. Scholars such as Ronald Berman (1994) point out that the decade of the 1920s was one of financial flourishing and ethical disintegration. A culture of consumption and display transformed and redefined social behavior and success. This way of life is evident in Gatsby's extravagant parties, where attendees "came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 39). The simile reduces humans to transient customers, underscoring the commodified aspect of social interaction. The *Great Gatsby* should be understood as a product of this historical moment that reflects the ideological conflicts between the old and the new values of morality and the new capitalist aspirations. For the purposes of analytical coherence, the study operationalizes the theoretical framework into specific elements of the text. Commodification is explored in the nature of love and desire, alienation is explored in the nature of space and symbol, and false consciousness is explored in the nature of the characters' internalization of capitalist values. These ideas are also examined from a New Historicist perspective, which places them in the ideological and material context of America in the 1920s. This interrelated framework is analyzed in the following sections in the context of class structure, commodified relations and moral decay.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Capitalism and Class Structure in 1920s America

The 1920s in America was a new era in the economic and social organization. Fitzgerald's characterization of social interactions as theatrical is reflected in the descriptions of people coming and going at Gatsby's parties, "like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 43). This was the era of the post-First World War industrialization, technology, and growth period in the United States economy. The transient moth image suggests that people are temporary consumers, that social identity is based on consumption, and not actual moral values. The American society changed into what historians refer to as a culture of consumption through mass

production, consumer credit, and even stock market speculation (Leuchtenburg, 1958). The accumulation of wealth, along with conspicuous consumption, turned out to be markers of success, and economic achievements transformed social hierarchies. This performative display is apparent in Gatsby's parties, where "men and girls came and went like moths" to eat, drink, and be merry (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 43). The excessiveness of music, alcohol, and dance, repeated over time, turns consumption into a social language that signals status.

The mentioned prosperity was unevenly distributed. The inequality in American society is explored through the contrast between Tom Buchanan's inherited wealth and George Wilson's financial struggles. Tom's self-confidence is juxtaposed with Wilson, who is "a blonde, spiritless man, anemic" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 28). The ten-year period escalated social class disparities between old money and those, such as industrial capitalists who had become rich, coupled with the working poor. The Jazz Age, as historian Frederick Lewis Allen (1931) observes, formed a society obsessed with riches, glamour, and gambling, yet a society marked by a deep divide beneath the glittering surface. This focus is reflected in Gatsby's luxurious parties, which are all about abundance but lack content and dedication. The American Dream portrayed material possessions and social mobility through wealth rather than moral desires and work achievement.

From a Marxist point of view, this is materially and symbolically inscribed in the novel's spatial structure, where East Egg symbolizes inherited capital and West Egg represents "new money" seeking legitimacy (Marx and Engels, 1978). Nick's description of Gatsby's house as a "factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 7) suggests that new money is perceived as imitation, despite its economic equivalence. In such a system, social power is in the hands of the owners of capital, and others are working to secure social power. Class identity is represented through economic, cultural, and moral aspects. The dominant ideology is created by the ruling class, which decides what is respectable, successful, and desirable. Marx and Engels (1978) stated that the dominant thoughts in a society reflect the interests of the ruling classes.

This was the case in the 1920s, when value was measured primarily by wealth. Conspicuous consumption, as defined by Thorstein Veblen, can be particularly applicable in this context. Veblen noted in his book (1899), *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, that the upper classes demonstrate their wealth to the outside world in a symbolic way that signals their status and dominance. As the Jazz Age approached in the twenties, it was becoming more apparent that this consumerism of display was becoming a focus of social acceptability, with extravagant parties, expensive fashion, automobiles, and mansions all becoming visible icons. Consumption was a sort of performance, a social, not just an economic, act.

The *Great Gatsby* uses a symbolic geography to create the notion of class hierarchy, allowing for careful textual analysis. The first time Nick Carraway describes East Egg, he characterizes it as a place where

“white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 8). The word “white” as an adjective suggests the purity of the architecture and the exclusivity of the culture—and the legitimacy of inherited wealth in 1920s America. The verb 'glittered' suggests a superficial shine, reflecting the fact that old money's veneer is more superficial than its underlying substance. This tension is a characteristic of the ideology of appearances, as Marxist critics identify it, which is the way in which social power is naturalized in aesthetic forms (Tyson, 2015).

In contrast, imitation and instability are the characterizing traits of West Egg. Gatsby's mansion is a “factual imitation” of a city hall in Normandy (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 9). The oxymoronic use of “factual” and “imitation” reflects the instability of class identity in a capitalist system. Despite Gatsby's huge fortune, his claim to the wealth is still viewed as illegitimate. Thus, the term is an implicit criticism reference to class distinction, and it clearly indicates that social hierarchy is not maintained solely on grounds of material difference but by culturally constructed markers of authenticity. Capitalist societies maintain the stratification and division of classes by means of symbolic systems that recognize and reject different types of wealth (Tyson, 2015).

The Valley of Ashes is a clear example of the humanity of capitalism. It is said to be “a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 26). The simile turns the pastoral image upside down, using the symbol of wheat (a symbol of life and sustenance) to be replaced by the symbol of ashes (the remains of industrial production). The “grotesque gardens” are a sign of a corrupted natural order, where growth is no longer organic but mechanical and destructive. The landscape expresses what Marx (1976) describes as the alienating features of industrial capitalism, where human labor is presented as a waste. George Wilson, who lives in this place, is physically and psychologically reduced; “ash-grey men” move through an environment that has been created by economic exploitation (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 26). Thus the Valley demonstrates the structural injustice that lies behind the apparent good fortune of both East Egg and West Egg and the ability of the capitalist system to produce prosperous results through the neglect and exclusion of the individuals who do not gain from it.

Old money and new money provide the difference between the two, and capitalism results in economic inequality as well as a moral hierarchy. Old money families claim cultural superiority despite their moral corruption. New money figures attempt to purchase status but remain socially excluded. The working population has been left marginalized and inhabited by poverty. According to Ronald Berman (1994), the novel reveals conflict between material achievements and moral emptiness in contemporary America. The success of an economy does not yield moral stability but, in most cases, increases competition, selfishness, and indifference.

Speculation and ill-gained profits of Prohibition also serve as an additional example of how ambiguous the culture of capitalist expansion is in terms of morality. Gatsby's bootlegging activities, associated

with his friendship with Meyer Wolfsheim, show how wealth is separated from its legal origins and highlight the amoral nature of economic growth. Orchestrated crime and bootlegging were common in the 1920s, which proved that ambition to make money was often unrestricted by legal and moral constraints (Leuchtenburg, 1958). In such a climate, the process of wealth accumulation was rather a process and not accumulation. The ethical value changed to profitability.

Ultimately, the novel shows us that class hierarchy is not only an economic but also a moral hierarchy too, in which wealth not only defines status but also responsibility. Prosperity turned into the new power. Economic power was put over moral judgment. Status and material interest defined the social relationships. Therefore, the capitalist conditions of the period cannot be separated from morally decadent subjects as they are portrayed in the novel. The hierarchy was not only an expression of inequality but also promoted the absence of moral codes and preached indifference. This is a class structure in history from which the moral dilemmas of the protagonists' development are based. This is seen in Tom and Daisy's "retreating back into their money" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 191) and being able to escape the tragic outcomes of characters such as Gatsby and Wilson.

4.2 The Commodification of Love and the Illusion of the American Dream

Among the greatest impacts of capitalist ideology in the 1920s was the restructuring of human relations as systems of exchange. In a capitalist society, as understood by Karl Marx, social relations are increasingly assuming the form of economic relations (Marx, 1976). Commodification reveals the process whereby human values, feelings, and identity are objectified and thus can be purchased, traded, or even put on display. Under these circumstances, even love risks being endangered by money and social standing rather than emotional bonding.

The most concentrated instance of commodification in the novel occurs in the representation of Daisy Buchanan's voice. When Nick reflects that Daisy's voice is "full of money" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 128), the metaphor performs a conceptual collapse wherein Daisy's desirability becomes indistinguishable from wealth itself. The passage warrants extended quotation:

"Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly. That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it. High in a white palace, the king's daughter, the golden girl... (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 128)

Is the repetition of "it" without a clear antecedent the pronoun referring to Daisy, her voice, or money itself? grammatically enacts the fusion of person and currency. The accumulation of metallic sound imagery ("jingle," "cymbals' song") reduces human vocal quality to the auditory signature of coins. Marx's concept of commodity fetishism explains this transformation: in capitalist society, "the social relations among individuals assume the form of relations between things." Daisy becomes a thing to be acquired, her value determined by exchange rather than intrinsic worth. As Depçi (2018) argues,

Fitzgerald demonstrates how "money creates an artificial world, an illusion for Gatsby, which he thinks he can exchange everything in return".

Gatsby's conviction that wealth can recover the past, "Can't repeat the past? ... Why, of course you can!" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 118), represents what Althusser terms ideological interpellation: Gatsby has internalized capitalism's promise that money can purchase anything, including time itself. His belief that his "factual imitation" mansion across the bay from Daisy's dock, with the green light as its focal point, can reverse five years of separation reveals the tragic structure of false consciousness. The comparative study of Fitzgerald and Miller confirms that both works critically portray the human cost of chasing this idealized dream, exposing its inherent contradictions and unattainability (Hossain et al., 2025; Mızrak, 2025).

An interpretation of the concept of conspicuous consumption that was introduced by Thorsten Veblen (1899) explains the context in which love occurs. A display- and status-oriented society views wealth as a language, and individuals use it to state their status. Not all mansions, parties, costly clothes, and luxury cars are taken as personal pleasures, but as public displays to demonstrate financial success. The novel expresses the view that material prosperity has taken the place of moral content in present-day America, as proposed by Ronald Berman (1994). Gatsby's assertion—"Can't repeat the past?... Why, of course you can!" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 118), reveals not merely personal delusion but an ideological internalization of capitalist temporality. The modal certainty ("of course") reflects what Althusser (1971) terms interpellation, whereby individuals misrecognize ideology as personal truth. Gatsby's language collapses temporal boundaries, suggesting that capital functions as a mechanism capable of restructuring not only social status but historical reality itself.

The American Dream, which used to be connected with diligent effort and ethical development, was dramatically changed in the 1920s. According to the original meaning of the term, as discussed by historians such as James Truslow Adams (1931), the American Dream was an opportunity with dignity. But during the Jazz Age, the dream was closely associated with material wealth and obvious affluence. Gatsby is a representation of this changed dream. He recreates himself, builds up a new identity, and ventures into illegal business to be part of the upper social fold. Nevertheless, he is not yet rejected by the realm of old money, even though he is economically successful. The fortune allows him to purchase opulence, yet it does not provide him with the cultural legitimacy that he needs.

The tragedy of Gatsby, according to Marxist theory, may be considered a case of ideological interpellation as defined by Althusser (1971): that is, the process by which individuals internalize prevailing values and construct their identities based on them. It is based on the belief that money will bring about happiness and love, which Gatsby lives by. He is not criticizing the capitalist system; he is attempting to learn it. He engages in the bootlegging business, which reveals the hypocrisy of morals

that are ingrained in the capitalist system. Even the ethical aspect is idolized at the expense of the monetary gain. The system promotes hoarding without consideration of production conditions.

Daisy's location also highlights the commodification of love. It is not her love for Tom Buchanan but her safety and her inherited fortune that make her get married. Tom is an embodiment of stability in the ruling group. The fact that Daisy could not abandon Tom speaks to the strength of economic formation compared to a desire. Her most popular quote of wishing her daughter to be a beautiful little fool (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 17) insinuates the knowledge of the restricted agency in this social system. Even women are placed in exchange patterns, which appreciate beauty and allure as much as independence.

American Dream, in turn, is an ideology that conceals the current division among classes. Capitalism preserves the separation among classes and conceives morality as one-sided, despite the fact that it is a system of opportunities. The failure of this illusion is represented by the death of Gatsby. He is socially vulnerable despite all his wealth and optimism. The same society that glorifies his parties deserts him when he dies. The novel reveals the barrenness under the glory of contemporary riches, as Berman (1994) puts it.

Love in *The Great Gatsby* cannot be just a personal tragedy from a Marxist and New Historicist's view. It is a historic event when the aspiration of the economy changed emotional life. Love is involved with position; identity is associated with money, and dreams are qualified by material success. Commodification of desire brings out the consciousness root of an ideology of capitalist society. This commodification of emotions is brought about directly because of the class hierarchy in the previous section.

4.3 Moral Corrosion Across Social Classes

The concept of ethical corruption in *The Great Gatsby* is not isolated to a single person or a position in social hierarchy but exists throughout all systems of American society in the 1920s. Marxist and New Historicist perspectives serve as the foundation for this corruption, but it takes the shape of structural consequences founded on capitalist ideology rather than the failure of personal issues. Since the worth of economic success has been defined as the core measure of worth, moral obligation was done away with in the name of material aspiration. The golden age of jazz became a culture of excess, and Churchwell (2013) notes that moral lapse was not the exception but became commonplace.

The upper classes, embodied in Tom and Daisy Buchanan, exemplify the amoral nature of inherited wealth. Tom breaks Myrtle's nose, "Making a short, deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 41); the words "short" and "deft" highlight efficiency and lack of intention. The violence does not demand effort or emotional commitment, and most importantly, no required consequences, according to the Marxist explanation. Tom's physical violence, infidelity, and indirect involvement in Gatsby's death through misleading Wilson have no legal or social consequences.

Nick's famous judgment warrants close reading: "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 191). "Smashed" is used to describe something that has been destroyed without purpose, such as when a child smashes a toy. The word "things and creatures" itself suggests that objects (cars, glasses at Gatsby's parties) are equal to living beings (Myrtle, Gatsby, Wilson). The repeated "whatever it was" implies Nick's inability to name the power that protects them—the power that is, the social energy, the invisible force that flows through society, that preserves the class hierarchy, which is capital itself, as Greenblatt puts it.

As Alam and Ahmad (2021) state, Tom Buchanan is a capitalist victimizer who has inherited his wealth, thus being able to engage in activities destructive to human relationships without repercussions. This is apparent when Tom carelessly buys "ten more dogs" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 28); even though the number "ten" is somewhat random, it indicates that money means nothing to him. That sometimes gives him a bit of freedom to not have to work, explain, or be held accountable for his actions. A new version of moral compromise is depicted by Gatsby, who represents the newly rich. Although he is seemingly loyal and idealistic, he uses bootlegging and organized crime to get his wealth. His economic self-creation cannot be separated from his dream to reclaim Daisy. The green light at the end of her dock can be interpreted as both romantic and emblematic as capitalism is concerned (Fitzgerald, 1925). Gatsby believes that wealth can restore the past: "Can't repeat the past? ... Why, of course you can!" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 118). It can be depicted in relation to what Louis Althusser (1971) refers to as ideological interpellation: people internalize societal values prevalent and formulate their identities based on them. Gatsby does not oppose capitalism; he wants to achieve mastery in it. His downfall is in believing in a system that leaves him out of ever being accepted.

The middle and working classes also exhibit moral corrosion shaped by economic aspiration. Myrtle Wilson seeks escape from poverty through her relationship with Tom. When she changes into her elaborate dress in the New York apartment, "her personality had also undergone a change... converted into impressive hauteur" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 34). She acts out class identity where affluence is equated with being superior. This show can be considered a fine illustration of conspicuous consumption theory by Veblen (1899): material signs are utilized to display and imitate social status. Even though she is socially dispensable, Myrtle is a believer in the elite values and defines dignity through the ownership of material belongings.

George Wilson, on the contrary, is the economic victim of industrial capitalism. The Valley of Ashes is stated to be "a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 26). This was a wasteland bearing the relic of the human aftermath of capitalistic production. Ronald Berman (1994) said that the Valley of Ashes talks about the hidden cost of American wealth (p. 102). Another way

through which Wilson has used structural marginalization is that he became desperate and turned to violence. The fact that he thinks that "God sees everything" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 170) shows that he is so desperate to find some moral authority in a society that is controlled by economic influence.

Jordan Baker is a symbol of the moral apathy of high society. She cheated during a golf competition, and she has driven recklessly, which depicts a character who has so far been used to getting away. She acknowledges that she relies on other people to exercise caution (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 63), which is a representation of a greater decline in responsibility. This is consistent with Christopher Lasch's general suggestion that contemporary capitalist culture encourages narcissistic individualism, which is mostly about self-interest rather than collective morals (Lasch, 1979).

Even the minor characters support the trend. When Gatsby dies, Klipspringer calls to see him not to offer him his condolences but to seek his "tennis shoes" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 180). Meyer Wolfsheim does not show up at the funeral, saying that, when a man is murdered, he never wants to be involved in the burial: "When a man gets killed I never like to get mixed up in it" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 183). These responses show the exchange character of social relationships. As soon as Gatsby becomes economically useless, the loyalty falls. It depicts the Marxian concept of alienation; in a capitalistic society, social relations become deceitful (Marx, 1978).

These characters present ideological contradictions of the Jazz Age according to the New Historicist approach. The twenties exalted the affluent and the spectacular, and moral conflict was going on under the rug. Greenblatt (1988) claimed that literary texts are implicated in disseminating social energy and patterns of power at the time of their creation. The nature of corruption is not limited to the individual, as demonstrated in the novel, where society is divided by the desire to become wealthy, whereby the concepts of morality and decadence have no class distinction. Thus, moral collapse, in the novel, is institutional. The upper class is closed; the competitors are emulative, and the rejected are desperate. Capitalism transforms priorities, and the value of material success has more weight than accountability and loyalty. Human value is gauged by economic success across the social classes. The tragedy of Gatsby is not his problem, but it is a historical example of when money replaces morality, and the American Dream is an ideological fallacy.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined *The Great Gatsby* employing Marxist and New Historicist approaches to demonstrate that the moral corruption portrayed in the novel cannot be presented as flaws of individual characters but is a structural consequence of capitalist modernity. The Jazz Age of economic prosperity, gambling, and consumer society changed relations between people and reorganized morality. The idea of the American Dream of equal opportunities and the illusion of an idea based on material ownership and inter-class movement becomes an ideology.

Characters from all social classes are associated with the ideals of a capitalist society where wealth is aligned with value. The aristocracy, protected by hereditary wealth, retains social power even when ethics fail them. Tom and Daisy, as the narrator sees it, smashed up things and creatures and then retreated into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess they had made (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 191). The newly wealthy, embodied by Gatsby, seek legitimacy by amassing wealth, and that wealth is going to bring back the past and win love. His economic status provides them with immunity. The fact that:

He broke off and began to walk up and down a desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers. 'I wouldn't ask too much of her,' I ventured. 'You can't repeat the past.' 'Can't repeat the past?' He cried incredulously. 'Why, of course you can!' (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 118).

This, therefore, shows that he strongly believed in a system that ultimately excludes him. In the meantime, the working population, represented by George Wilson and the Valley of Ashes, displays the price of industrial capitalism in human lives. The barren landscape where "ashes grow like wheat" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 26) reveals the spiritual and financial dross behind the rose-colored façades of wealth.

The ethical degradation found in every level of society is demonstrated through the novel as a result of its symbolic geography and the interactions between characters. Power, desire, and identity are driven by wealth. Human relations are transformed into transactional exchanges, and loyalty is lost when material advantage disappears. The death of Gatsby, after which the people who enjoyed his generosity turned out to be so unconcerned, proves that all social ties in a commodified society are so weak. In the end, Fitzgerald leaves behind a society in which money has replaced the role of morality as the organizing principle of life. Gatsby is tragic not simply because he chooses the wrong path, but because he thinks there is such a thing as a viable American Dream, which has already been turned into a spectacle and a routine of capitalism. In this way, the novel introduces moral corruption as the historical condition of the 1920s: a world where economic aspiration transforms moral principles and whose people of all social groups become subjects of ideological reality.

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